



July 18, 2018

Re: *Samy Hamzeh*

Dear Mr. Bugni,

I am a full professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Your office, the Federal Defender of Wisconsin, has retained me at an hourly rate of \$150. So far for this report and consulting on the behavior at issue in this case, I have been paid \$3750.

In rendering this report, I am relying on empirical research in the behavioral and social sciences that is published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. The peer-review process provides some guarantee that the research is of high quality and generates reliable results. The thrust of this report concerns the impact of social influence and reciprocity on an individual and his or her decision making.

Social influence occurs when one person does something that causes another person to behave differently from how he or she would otherwise behave. In other words, social influence is a behavior change that is caused by another person. Social scientists distinguish between three forms of social influence: Obedience, conformity, and informational influence.

*Obedience* has to do with changing our behavior to please an authority figure or to avoid aversive consequences. Example: A prisoner complies with an order given by a prison guard.

*Conformity* is a behavior change that is caused by one's desire to go along with the group, to fit in, or to be accepted by the group (even if one does not agree with the group). Example: A teenager smokes marijuana to be accepted by his/her peers, even though he or she doesn't really want to.

*Informational influence* is prompted by the belief that another person is competent and has the correct information. Example: An individual gets an umbrella insurance policy because his friend, who knows a lot about insurance policies and finances, told him that it was a good thing to have such a policy.

Certain social factors influence our willingness to go along with others and their decisions, these include situations in which we are alone with two other individuals who are trying to influence us. At its most basic level, we go along with others when there is a reason for us to do so. We might do something that we wouldn't have done otherwise, because the other person has power over us (our boss, a person who threatens us physically). Or we go along with others because we

believe that their judgment is better than ours. Or because we are persuaded by a particular argument that we hadn't thought of before. Sometimes we just do what the majority of people around us do without thinking very much.

When we are alone and we are in company of two or more people who are trying to influence us (= to make us do something that we wouldn't have done otherwise) it's very hard to resist this influence attempt. So when we are with two friends and we are trying to decide on a restaurant, and both of our friends say that they really, really want to go to a Mexican restaurant, we tend to go along, even when we would not like to.

A classic experiment conducted by Asch documents this effect (the original experiment was conducted in 1951, but has been replicated numerous times since then). Participants were shown three line segments of different lengths (the "comparison lines") and a fourth line segment (the "reference line"). Their task was to identify the comparison line that had the same length as the reference line. Each participant completed 18 trials. The task was very easy: When participants were tested alone, less than 1% of the responses were incorrect. But things changed radically when participants were tested in a group setting in which group members had to announce their answers publicly. In one condition, the experimenter had recruited 7 student actors who behaved according to a script. They pretended to be naïve participants, just like the real participant, who was the 8<sup>th</sup> group member. The student actors always responded before the real participant. On certain trials they all chose a comparison line that was shorter than the reference line (a wrong answer). Would the real participant go along? The results showed that 76% of participants conformed to group pressure at least once by indicating the incorrect line.

Why do we tend to go along with two or more people who all defend the same point of view? There are several reasons: First, we have been trained to accept that the majority decides. Second: There is no other dissenter present. Scientific studies on social influence in groups of multiple individuals show that it is much easier to resist the influence attempt by the other group members if there is at least one other dissenter present. Third: We always interpret what happens around us and how other people behave. If we are alone with two other people, and they agree on a particular interpretation of an event or on a particular course of action, then their way of seeing things becomes reality.

There are numerous reports of individuals who break away from a group and are then surprised about their own prior behaviors and beliefs: Individuals who escaped from Jim Jones' religious sect (900 of Jones' followers committed mass suicide in Guyana in 1978). Prison guards in the Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq (2004). Even people who move to a different neighborhood or a different part of the country sometimes change their attitudes and ways of seeing things. The famous book *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding (1954) describes this phenomenon very vividly.

Certain actions or dynamics can induce a person to consider decisions and actions that they normally wouldn't take. So, for instance, as human beings, we have a number of fundamental needs. One of these needs is the need to belong, or the need to be socially connected. We need friends who like us for who we are and who provide us with social support if needed.

If our fundamental need to belong is threatened, we are willing to consider all sorts of actions that we normally wouldn't take. This can easily be seen among school children who are not very popular. They are willing to do all sorts of crazy actions – sometimes even dangerous actions – if that increases their chances of being liked and being part of the “cool kids.”

In 2002 Kimberly Maxwell published an influential paper entitled “Friends: The role of peer influence across adolescent risk behaviors” in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. The research highlights the social influence that friends have to make individuals conform and partake in risk behaviors like drug usage, alcohol consumption, smoking tobacco, etc. Not surprisingly then, other studies show that peer-oriented health education (smoking, drinking) yields better results than health education done by others (potentially strangers).

The fact that a person does something in response to social pressure does not mean that left to their own devices a person would do the same thing, and many different studies have documented this phenomenon. As a fundamental proposition, it is well documented that social influence and social pressure can cause us to do things that we would never even consider doing if we were left to their own devices. Of course, people differ in the extent to which they are susceptible to social pressure. A small percentage of people have a high capacity to resist social pressure. But when put in particular situations, most of us can be induced to behave in ways that we would not have predicted ourselves. Here are some examples.

Milgram's obedience experiment (1963) illustrates that principle well. There, participants were put in the role of the teacher whose task it was to administer electric shocks of increasing intensity to another participant in the role of the student. Participants were seated in front of an electric shock generator with a row of switches marked from “15 volts (Slight Shock)” to “375 volts (Danger: Severe Shock)” to “450 volts (XXX).” The participants did not know that the student was a “confederate” (actor) and that no shocks were in fact transmitted. When participants hesitated, they were instructed by the experimenter to continue. Two thirds (65%) of participants continued to the highest level of electric shock, 450 volts.

Zimbardo's prison experiment (1973) also documents this phenomenon. Participants were male college students who qualified as “normal” in numerous psychological tests. They were randomly assigned to become either guards or prisoners in a mock prison that was built in the basement of a Stanford university building. Within a few days, the prison guards turned into hideous individuals who subjected the prisoners to all sorts of atrocities without being instructed to do so, e.g., sleep deprivation, nudity, humiliation, taunting, and physical punishment. The abuse became so intense that the experiment had to be terminated on day 6, although it was originally scheduled to run for two weeks.

Most non-experts (and even certain experts) tend to explain the behavior of others in terms of their personality, but fail to appreciate the extent to which this behavior was shaped by social influence and the “situational pressures.” When participants received a detailed description of the Milgram experiment (see above) and were asked to predict their behavior, most people said that they would not conform. When highly experienced psychiatrists were asked to predict people's behaviors in the Milgram experiment, they thought that at most 1% would deliver the maximum shock of 450 volts (but 65% did).

Although the original studies were conducted several decades ago, they have been replicated numerous times since (e.g., Burger, 2009; Haslam, Loughnan, & Perry, 2014; Dambrun & Vatine, 2010; Begue, Beauvois, Courbet, et al., 2015; Reicher, Haslam, & Smith, 2012).

Beyond social influence, another powerful driver of human behavior is a phenomenon called reciprocity, which factors into social influence. Reciprocity is one of the most powerful norms in our society. When someone does something for us, we are compelled to “give back in kind.” For instance, when we have borrowed our neighbor’s lawn mower, and our neighbor stops by to borrow our ladder, it is hard for us to say no. Reciprocity is one of the fundamental laws of human society. It played a key role in human evolution and it is important in all cultures.

When another person has done something for us, we know that they expect us to reciprocate. It’s the knowledge of the other person’s expectations that causes us to return the favor or “to respond in kind.” Helping others is like lending money: The recipient is “indebted” to the helper/lender.

While this is every person’s common experience, scientific studies have documented the effect of reciprocity on an individual and their decision making. In a study conducted by Regan (1971), the real subject was paired with another person (“Joe”) who pretended to be a subject but was in fact an actor who worked for the researcher. The two individuals filled out surveys. At some point Joe left the room and came back with two cokes, one for himself and one for the subject. At the end of the experiment Joe asked the other person if he would buy raffle tickets from him to help him win a prize. The subjects who received a Coke from Joe bought twice as many raffle tickets as the ones who hadn’t received a Coke from him. What’s more, they paid far more than the value of the Coke and they did so even if they didn’t like Coke. We reciprocate even when we didn’t request the favor and do not care for the “gift” that is given to us.

Several studies examined a phenomenon referred to as “door-in-the-face” or “reciprocal concessions.” In one study (Cialdini and colleagues, 1975), people were divided into 2 groups. The first group was asked to volunteer as counselors for a group of juvenile delinquents for 2 hours per week, for a period of 2 years. After they refused, a second request was made and they were asked to take them to the zoo for one day. The second group was asked only to take them to the zoo. It was found that 50% people from the 1st group agreed to the second request that was made (taking them to the zoo) as opposed to the 17% in the second group.

This study shows the following: When we have just refused a very large request, it is virtually impossible for us to refuse a smaller request that is made right afterwards. This is because we are victims of the reciprocity rule: The other person has just made a concession (by asking for something smaller). It is now our turn to reciprocate and to also make a concession (by accepting the second request).

There are also certain factors that magnify the reciprocity impulse, among these is friendship and for some their culture will make them more susceptible to feelings of loyalty and reciprocity. For instance, the longer the reciprocal relationship has existed, the more we feel compelled to reciprocate. Once we have borrowed our neighbor’s lawn mower five times, and our neighbor has borrowed our ladder four times, it is virtually impossible for us to refuse our neighbor’s request when he comes over to borrow our ladder a fifth time.

Sometimes we violate the reciprocity norm, but only with people who we don't care about. We are highly likely to reciprocate with friends and with people who play an important role in our lives. One reason why people respect the reciprocity norm is because they do not want to be seen as an "over-benefiter." We are thus highly likely to reciprocate when we fear that we might come across as over-benefiters to our friends. And friends can elicit this fear by making comments about the extent to which we benefited from previous favors/concessions (Belmi & Pfeffer, 2015).

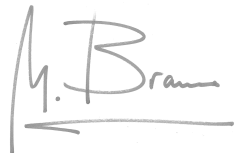
Culture also affects reciprocity. The US is an independent culture that values individual achievements and self-reliance. Other countries, like Middle-Eastern and Asian countries, have a more interdependent culture that values group harmony and fitting in. Being loyal to friends and reciprocating favors are very important in such cultures. In Pakistan, for example, 'Vartan Bhanji' is a ritualized form of gift exchange to sort out all outstanding debts or to ensure the equality of exchange. Shen, Wan, and Wyer (2011) showed that Asians are more likely than North Americans to refuse a small gift that is offered to them by a casual acquaintance because they want to avoid the feeling of indebtedness they would experience if they cannot reciprocate (see also Miller & Bersoff, 1994).

Although the US is among the countries that have the lowest reciprocity (relatively speaking), the reciprocity norm is still quite strong in the US. Many studies conducted in the US testify to the powerful influence of the reciprocity norm. One might say that the reciprocity norm has very strong effects on behavior in the US, and extremely strong effects in other cultures.

A person with a lower IQ tends to be more vulnerable to social influence and the trappings of reciprocity, not directly but indirectly. So individuals with a lower IQ are more frequently in situations where the other persons have greater expertise or have better arguments (or at least can verbalize these arguments in a better way). They have thus learned to go along with others as a sort of masking. They have neither the cognitive resources nor the language capacities to challenge a majority. They are also more dependent on others with regard to getting help and being connected. They are thus more likely to reciprocate favors to maintain social relationships.

This is best documented in Freeman's (2012) research, which shows that individuals with low IQ are more prone to commit crimes and be victims themselves. Morgan and Lilienfeld (2000) also found a relationship between lower executive functioning and antisocial behavior, with the latter factor being linked to criminal activity. One might thus argue that individuals with a low IQ are "used" more (or taken advantage of) by other people. Paus, Toro, and colleagues (2008) have also shown that there is a relationship between cortical thickness and the ability to resist peer influence among teenagers, and cortical thickness is linked to intelligence.

Sincerely,



Markus Brauer  
Professor